

60.427.1



PRESIDENTIAL
ADVISORY COMMISSION
ON HOLOCAUST ASSETS
IN THE UNITED STATES

PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY COMMISSION ON HOLOCAUST ASSETS IN THE UNITED STATES

Edgar M. Bronfman
Chairman

Kenneth L. Klothen
Executive Director

For Immediate Release

September 13, 1999

Contact: Stu Loeser (202) 371-6400, extension 456

Statement of **Edgar Bronfman**, Chair of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, regarding cultural property of Holocaust victims - namely, books of a Jewish religious nature - that may be in the possession of the Library Congress:

"The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States has shared with the Librarian of Congress our original research and other research that we have collected on Holocaust victims' books that may be in the Library's collections. We are satisfied with the Library's initial response and look forward to working with the Library to learn about these books and determine what steps we must take to ensure that justice will be done."

Background: the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States was created by the U.S. Holocaust Assets Commission Act of 1998 (PL 105-186) and given the mandate to:

- Conduct original research into what happened to the assets of Holocaust victims - including gold, other financial instruments and art and cultural objects such as books - that passed into the possession or control of the Federal government;
- Survey the research done by others about what happened to the assets of Holocaust victims; and
- Report to the President, making recommendations for actions to achieve justice.

President's Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the U.S.

Research Report #6

by: Abraham J. Edelheit

December 20, 1999

Subject: Review of the Surkamp Papers (RG1136) at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research,
Pt. I

Overview: James Surkamp was a freelance journalist who became aware of the subject of Nazi looting of assets during the 1970s and began to collect archival material in order to write a book. For whatever reason, Surkamp did not complete the text and deposited his accumulated papers at the YIVO archive. I have now undertaken a detailed review of the first two boxes of this material and have surveyed the remainder and can offer the following observations. The collection has been given YIVO record group number 1136 and will be identified as such (along with box#/file# hereafter).

1. Provenance: The collection totals 4.5 linear feet that is contained in nine (9) boxes arranged into slightly more than 180 files. Each file, in turn, contains material on a specific topic of interest. Most of the material originated with NARA, with smaller amounts of archival material coming from the Library of Congress and the British Public Records Office. In most cases it is not immediately possible to identify NARA record group and file number information. That said, synchronization is possible if the Surkamp documents are carefully compared to the documents listed in Bradsher's *Holocaust-Era Assets: A Finding Aid to Records at the National Archives*. For example, the items on Project Safehaven (1136/1/2) parallel the items in NARA RG 226 located in 190/6/12/03 (per the Bradsher finding aid, online version).

In addition to official documentation, Surkamp accumulated copies from a wide range of books and articles on the subject of Nazi looting. These are of uneven quality and, for PCHA purposes, can be ignored. Finally, the collection also includes a sampling of Surkamp's notes on the subject and a few sample chapters that he produced prior to abandoning the project. Whereas all (or almost all) of the archival material may be obtained elsewhere, this part of the collection might be of the greatest interest, since it can show us the directions that Surkamp was taking. These may prove to be negative examples, but may also provide us with hitherto unconsidered research directions.

2. Relevance: The Surkamp papers are most directly relevant to the PCHA Art and Cultural Property team. However, some of the documents do have relevance to the other teams as well. For example, Files 85 and 121 contain items of interest to the Gold Team and Files 114, 115, and 150 directly relate to the research of the Non-Gold Financial Assets team. Then to, many of the documents surveyed seem to have multiple relevance. This is particularly true of the aforementioned Project Safehaven reports and of documents strewn throughout the material that I have studied in detail relating to senior SS or NSDAP members who participated in looting either for themselves or as part of a "official" mission. For example, in typewritten notes contained in 1136/1/15 and /16 Surkamp alleged a connection between art theft, financial chicanery, and the financing of the SS Intelligence service (the SD). This is clearly a matter deserving further research.

The Project Safehaven reports (1136/1/2) play an especially important role in this context, and deserve close attention. Project Safehaven was a joint intelligence operation undertaken by the OSS, the State Department, and the Treasury Department's Foreign Enforcement Section to stem German sale of art and other valuables (including gold) in neutral

countries. It was hoped that closing off such sales would deny the Germans vitally needed hard currency and would thus detract from the German war effort. Again, much of the contents relate to art looting. However, considerable portions of each of the reports I have seen also refer to bank activities as well. Efforts to staunch the flow of hard currency into the Reich ranged from Europe to Latin America and to Asia as well (a parallel operation, called Safehaven Asia sought to deprive the Japanese of hard currency). Major efforts were expended by Safehaven agents in Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Turkey, and Argentina, to name only the most prominent countries in the reports. Given the nature of the assets looted and of the international banking industry at the time, it is conceivable that looted bank accounts of Jewish victims may have — after suitable laundering — even ended up in U.S. banks.

In this brief review I have relied mainly on one file and on the index to the record group produced by the YIVO archivists. I cannot at this junction provide a detailed report on all the contents of all the files: as of this writing I have some fourteen pages of notes on the Surkamp papers (covering the contents on Boxes 1 and 2). Even so, it is clear to me that the material does indeed have relevance to the PCHA's work.

3. Recommendation: It seems clear to me that a detailed review of the contents of the remaining boxes should be undertaken either by myself or by another member of the PCHA staff. While much of the material is derived from other archives, Surkamp's notes and his organization may allow us an opportunity to view our work from a different perspective and provide new insights into the direct matter at hand.

6042721

david glasner

From: Gene Sofer
Sent: Wednesday, September 27, 2000 5:55 PM
To: David Glasner
Subject: LC description



Libraryfindings.doc

Cherck my rewrite. I added an explanation of Machzor and fixed the classified/ unclassified thing.

The Library of Congress

As a result of its research into the history of the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. (JCR), the Commission learned that between July 1, 1949 and January 31, 1952 the JCR had transferred to libraries in the United States approximately 158,000 items. The Library of Congress received 5,708 books and periodicals, of which 163 were defined by the JCR as rare.

On August 6, 1999 Commission staff met with James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress, to alert him to the presence of these books and to begin a dialogue that the Commission staff hoped would culminate in an agreement about how the Library could best recognize the existence of the books.

Using documents provided to it by the Commission, Library staff realized that in 1950 and 1951 it had purchased thousands of these items from the JCR at the cost of 30 cents apiece. Working through the papers of Professor Salo Baron, the JCR's president, located in Stanford University, the Commission staff uncovered the list of the rare books distributed by the JCR. In the margins of the document were the initials LC next to 107 entries. The Commission provided this list to the Library, which learned for the first time the extent of its holdings of rare books from the JCR.

In a meeting attended by Commission member Ira Leesfield, the Commission and the Library agreed that an appropriate next step would be to sample the Library's Hebraica collection of approximately 165,000 volumes to try to determine how many JCR books were still likely to be in the possession of the Library of Congress. The Hebraica collection includes items written in Hebrew or Yiddish. Items written in other languages would be found in the Library's general collection that numbers about 25 million volumes. To conduct this sample, the Commission received the *pro bono* assistance of Dr. Arthur Kirsch, Professor Emeritus of Statistics at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Over the course of several weeks, Professor Kirsch designed and executed his sample of the Library's Hebraica collection. The sample included classified as well as unclassified items, periodicals, and books the Library deems to be rare. (Classified items are those that have a call number. Unclassified items are shelved by title but do not have a call number. Both categories can be accessed through the Hebraica card catalogue). The Commission staff projected that there were approximately 125,100 items included in these sections of the Hebraica collection. Out of this number, approximately 2,500 books had some type of relevant marking or stamp on them. The survey revealed that nearly 2,300 of these items came from the JCR, while the remaining 200 were clearly looted from Jewish victims of the Holocaust that came to the Library by other means.

This effort yielded several important facts. First, it added considerably to the Library's own knowledge of its Hebraica collection. Until the Commission instigated this exercise, the Library believed that it had, at most, a handful of books and periodicals and that those were relatively unimportant from a scholarly perspective. The Library now knows that it holds at least 2,500 items from the JCR in its Hebraica collection and it is reasonable to assume that more books in other languages may have been placed in other collections throughout the library. Notably,

researchers found nearly all of the 107 books that were designated for the Library of Congress on the JCR's rare book list.

Contrary to what was thought previously, many of the items received from the JCR are important examples of Hebraica. For example, in the rare books, classified and unclassified sections there are numerous volumes of Talmudic manuscripts, Machzors (holiday prayer books used on the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement) and other religious texts.

The Library also possesses secular items from the JCR, such as a Yiddish translation of Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, that have important historical value.

Finally, the sampling revealed that many of the items received from the JCR did not have the commemorative bookplate that the JCR requested receiving institutions to attach, although the Library still has the bookplates it received 50 years ago from the JCR.

The Commission is awaiting a proposal from the Library.